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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

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### WRATH AND RUTH

THE Great War has been fought. The dead, brave and poltroon, innocent and criminal, lie in their graves. The maimed, the broken, and the bereaved, with such resignation as they can command, live on, facing the gray decline of unilluminated years. And the great mass of mankind, beholding the fullness of their human deed, are brought face to face with their own reflection, judged of themselves.

What philosopher, in the fall of 1918, can write of human nature and achievement as he would have written in the spring of 1914? What prophet can now prophesy as he would then have prophesied? Or what nation, of all earth's nations, can now cling to the purposes and politics which it pursued in that day, briefly past in time, but in thought remote and buried? The world has changed since 1914; the Titanism in human nature which we who call ourselves the civilized had deemed to lie deeper than Orcus has made the lands to tremble and has lighted cities with lurid flame; fanes are shattered and the old images are overthrown.

Looked at from the vantage of four years' experience the ideals of 1914 seem shot through with the bizarre, the puerile, the presumptuous. Then we believed, with all our ostensible souls, in human self-sufficiency; we believed in hard reason and practical realities, in the panacean powers of science and in the substantial good of properties acquired; we believed, gaily, inflatedly, in our superiority over all that was humanly past and in our ability to insure progress through the future; most of all, we believed in the importance of looking out for "Number One"—whether Number One were a man or a nation—and we trusted unblushingly in the white man's capacity to calculate and get the Good. Even our altruism—and surely it was the most amazing of our egoisms—was unabashed: the world was populous with reformers who called themselves servants, and proposed to be tyrants, with no other credential than the approbation of their own bland consciences. The whole attitude was taken as of course, and regarded as common sense, and lived in as finality; and man's prime virtue was held to be that he was self-made.

Then this self-made man produced his man-made war. There is a satisfaction of the kind we call grim to be derived from the clear fact that war is man-made; we shoulder the responsibility for the majority of our afflictions upon impersonal nature, but this we must accept; and accepting it, see in it plain truths of our own nature. Bitter as it is, the war is none the less a needed medicine; we had lived in a world of self-illusion, and worse, of ignoble self-illusion; the war has shattered this, pricked our bubble of conceit, and has shown us, not Man as he is, which God alone can know, but the civilized twentieth century man of Europe and America, blown with pride, as both worse and better than he had dreamed.

Aye, better as well as worse. All-seeing heaven alone knows what arrogance, avarice, lust, cruelty, diabolism, what storms of spite and flames of murderous hate, man has been shown capable of in this war. But there are other pictures, beautiful even in the midst of terror: heroism, devotion, righteous wrath, gentleness, martyrdom, like pure transfigurations of dross souls, which, even more than the first, give the lie to the idols we had erected.

Among philosophers the rashest of these idolatries was surely that of human reason: we plumed ourselves upon our rationalities, our science; we styled our time an Age of Reason, an Enlightenment; we paraded our sense of reality and proclaimed the sufficiency of the intellect in the guidance of human affairs. And reason, deliberate and calculating, precipitated this war; and reason, cool and hard-headed, scarred its history with atrocity; and reason—in what name but in that of reality?—pandered to every baseness of material appetite. In such sense is reason our guide!

But again, we philosophers, with what little disguise we proclaimed the biological primacy, in human nature, of the passion for self-indulgence. We called it utilitarian happiness; we chattered about fitness and self-preservation; but we meant to say that the sole key to human conduct is selfish hedonism. And now the spectacle of the war has shown us whole peoples swayed by untaught pity to the surrender of their comfort, and thousands and repeated thousands of earth's common men making a glad sacrifice of their lives for the good of other men and for the salvation of their ideals of right. Far from a first and fundamental, self-seeking is rather a weak and pacifist human sentiment: the springs of great action move elsewhere.

Here, too, philosophers have been self-deceived; and in a third place by their notion that justice and right are an insight common to all normal mankind, a contribution of our common sense. For the war could never have been fought had not each human group in its

turn been founded in the conviction that its cause was the just cause; wherefore we have had before us the profound and sobering spectacle of men in a passion of righteousness slaying one another and giving themselves up to die, each that his idol should not fall. Other motives, some ignoble, some instinctive, have played their part in the movement of the war; but who can doubt that they pale into irrelevancy beside the dominance of these—the reason, the pity, and the sense of right—which so resistlessly give the lie to all that we have adjudged of human nature? And again, who can doubt, in his philosophic moods, that in this great and terrible conflict of man with man, wrath and ruth are revealed as seated traits of that nature, traits which, even when noblest, show how sadly our affairs are out of gear with the world?

The philosophy of our past—amused of its own drolleries, enamoured of its own sagacities, convinced of its own sweet reasonableness—is to-day fordone, blighted and withered under the blazing apocalypse of war. Its problems are no longer problems, nor its solutions ways of grace. It is true that its language is still spoken by the many among us, men with clogged ears and eyes of clay. Even over the ruin ministers of consolation come talking of the eventual human “good” which will make of the war a blessing and will justify all its expenditures, all its blood and torments. “Justify”? But to whom? Are not the slain slain, and can their blood be silenced? Have not the tortured suffered, and are their pains no heritage of ours? Is the past non-existent? For whom, then, is the justification? to whom the good? The man of affairs does well, perhaps, to forget upon what foundations he builds; but philosophy moves not save by reflection and in its essence is timeless.

And again they come to us, the comforters, with the high word Democracy: it is for democracy, for the race, for humanity, that all is endured. But do we know, in our heart of hearts, that the democracy is worth it? If reason is no guide, if our masters are our passions, is it indeed so great a thing to make passion everywhere free? . . . Yet again, religion is to be, not re-born, but remade: a *new* religion of humanity is to redeem the war’s losses. But who, among men acquainted with thought, can dream that a creed made to order can win belief? . . . Nay, what is the truth? Is not pugnacity human, and as deeply human as charity? Three score years of peace we may have, for the war has been fearful and exhausting; but we can not make over human nature in a day, and pugnacity, the brute willingness to fight, is an instinct of human nature. Indeed, it may be, philosophically and truly speaking, as precious an instinct as any that we possess, for who among men, up to this hour, can give philosophical warrant, to me or any other

Manichæan, that this our universe is itself pacifist, and that there is within it no deep and eternal and bloody warfare of good and evil?

To err is human. . . . Aye, aye; but how profound, how inscrutably substantial is this illusion in our human composition? What kind of a universe created me, that it must deceive me? Is it, too, wandering and uncertain or is it curst at the core with duplicity? Are we altogether in error about right and wrong, good and evil, true and false? and helplessly in error? Is there no hold which our reason or feeling or moral sense can secure? Is there no cosmic sanity, no place where men can stand square with their world?

Questions such as these are the old questions of philosophy. But the old answers have played out into shallows, and now we must take them up again, from their source, which is the perennial source of human experience and which to-day is ruddied with new-shed blood. It is a weary toil, and one oft-repeated in the long course of human thinking; but it is ours. At the outset, we may be clear on one point at least: the ornate edifice which we have named Science, and the high ritual which we have called Rationalism, are tokens of a wanton and degraded cult, only to be cleansed save as they be converted to a purer and humaner understanding of the Good. Aforetime it was said, *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*; to-day, with the dread fruits of war outspread before us, we must repeat, *Tantum ratio, tantum scientia*—to such ills doth reason also persuade! . . . But at least we recognize the ills; out of the past we have this one conviction to build upon.

What is the Good? That is still our problem; in philosophy it is the sole final problem. *La science des choses extérieures ne me consolera pas de l'ignorance de la morale, au temps d'affliction; mais la science des mœurs me consolera toujours de l'ignorance des sciences extérieures.* So spoke Pascal, doubting at the beginning of our period what the succeeding centuries have wholly justified him in doubting; for this at least we know of man, passionate pilgrim that he is, his truth is an inward and driving truth, not a scaffolding of external things. Nay, Pascal, in his fragment *De l'esprit géométrique*, makes it our very punishment and corruption that the reason is enslaved to the passion, and "it is to punish this disorder by an order conformed to it," he says, "that God casts his light into the mind only after having conquered the rebellion of the will by a sweetness wholly celestial, which charms it and leads it."

Your twentieth century philosopher of science is perhaps little inclined to harken to the recluse of Port Royal, savant and mathematician though he was; yet by some such search as Pascal's, for a new grace and a new illumination of the intelligence, must the quest

of the Good be carried forward. All our powers—reason, feeling, moral sense—are selective in their operation; all alike, they pursue and they abandon pursuit, and their ends are determined by some nature more profoundly ours than we are willing to own. Yet it is just this profoundly human nature, which must also in its degree be the cosmic nature, that we must fathom, if we are to make for philosophy in dividing the good from the evil in all that tempts us. Herein is shown our task, herein the destiny of thought.

To be sure the task is beset with an apparent futility. Often as the quest has been essayed in the past, even so often has it ended in deception; not that naught has been gained, but assuredly naught in which we could rest, no quiescence, no end: the nature of man, which alone can show us the nature of the world and alone can be the measure of the Good, is still dark and unfathomed; how, then, can we hope to do better than our fathers in philosophy? Nay; we can not. But we shall do, perchance not as well as they, but still our part, if we but make the attempt in what new light our new experience has given us. For, indeed, history itself is the portrayal of truth, and the search for values is their essence; we must cease asking for values that are but eulogies of the past; we must find them in life itself, in time, not in eternity. Once more to quote the wise Pascal: "Naught satisfies us save the combat; not victory itself;" and a more ancient and metaphysical framing of the same truth strikes off the very form of nature, man's and the world's, τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τέλος, ἢ δ' ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον. To which, again, Pascal adds the codicil: "*Craindre la mort hors du péril, et non dans le péril; car il faut être homme.*"

At the last, so we all know, to earth-born men the death must come, to individuals and to nations and to the race. This fact also philosophers must contemplate and measure. And if we say now that the Good is in our human quest of it, how can we pronounce, foreseeing our doom, aught save its ultimate defeat and destruction? Are not Goodness and Beauty, after all, but a flare in time, to be snuffed out in eternity? Who shall be the conqueror, save the last great Darkness? . . . There is no vanity so great as is prophecy; wherefore I would give such token as I may, using the language of probability, and in the form of a myth. . . .

Through many millennia will have passed the circle of human affairs and through many millennia earth and sea and air will have surrendered to human wills their secretest powers; industry will have branded the continents with man's geometry; the arts will have starred them with monumental splendors; in the domain of thought science will have organized its numbers into a very simulacrum of the perfect cosmos; and in politics all felicities will have been lived

through. But yet other millennia will pass, and the last man will die as certainly as the first man has died. But not without heritors. No doubt, long ere this, man's mammalian companions will have succumbed; but the birds will still survive. Light of weight and swift of wing, able to forage in every clime and to find food in every cranny, the birds are less slaves to gravity than is aught other earth-dweller: they can laugh at man's clumsy aviations, for their domain of the air is not by grace of earth's mineral, but in defiance of it. And the birds are artists and builders and songsters, devotees and exemplars of beauty. Wherefore, long after man's tall monuments have crumbled, and centuries after the bones of the last human race have bleached and weathered, the birds will live on—Earth's final race—and over the tombs of men departed their songs will answer the music of the spheres, as the Sun dies away into the cosmic twilight. Surely it was the anticipation of such a finality which inspired the Wikeno tale to which mine is but the supplement; for these Indians say that the immortals would have endowed men with everlasting life, but a little bird wished death into the world: "Where shall I nest me in your warm graves," it cried, "if ye men live on forever!" So it was decreed that men must die, and the immortals returned to heaven, whence they looked down and beheld men mourning their dead; whereupon mortal souls were transformed into drops of the blood of life, blown broadcast by the winds unto a new birth.

Those only smile at myths who are unacquainted with human history and with the motives which lie deepest in human conduct, and forget that that conduct is the end and its motives the final motives. In our own day and hour we are brought fearfully and inwardly into the presence of two such motives, wrath and ruth, which have transfigured, for a new cycle, the visage of our nature. Let them be but righteous wrath and penitential ruth, for our penitences are our supreme credos, and our condemnations are our fullest measures of this two-fold world. Then may the requiem of the birds be as a last great orison in our behalf, pleading the cause of man, not for what he has done, but for the dust that is in him and the breath which is his life, which are of the Cosmos, which are of God. . . .

*Lacrymosa die illa  
Qua resurgat ex favilla  
Judicandus homo reus:  
Huic ergo parce, Deus!*

HARTLEY B. ALEXANDER.